

[HB 6781](#), An Act Addressing Housing Affordability For Residents In The State.

Chairs Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, Ranking Members Representative Scott, Senator Sampson, and members of the committee, my name is Maria Weingarten. I am a realtor, a former auditor with PwC and currently serve as a member of New Canaan's Board of Finance. I am here as an individual citizen and as a founder of CT169Strong to speak in opposition to HB6633, the Fair Share Plan.

The concerning aspects of the bill would:

1) Change §8-30j plans from affordable housing plans to plans to affirmatively further fair housing, meaning to a) develop additional affordable housing, b) overcome patterns of segregation, c) promote equity in housing and related community assets (addressing segregation based on a variety of classes), and foster inclusive communities from barriers; such plans would have to be approved by OPM, which would also create demographic and segregation datasets for each municipality.

- This bill directly contradicts all Fair Housing Laws and the U.S. Constitution, which seeks to provide equal treatment under the law. The civil rights act prohibits discrimination on the basis of certain protected classes. This bill would require municipalities to identify groups of people by those classes and then plan about how to break up those groups. This is highly prescriptive social engineering and that is not the proper role of government, dictating how people should live and where to live. This could mean breaking up communities that choose to live together by choice, for instance, an immigrant community in one municipality or a religious community that lives around a church or temple. Do we really want West Hartford to create a plan to break up the Jewish community there? Or the Brazilian community in Danbury?
- Do rural municipalities really need to plan to try to attract more single 20 somethings? What if they are moving to cities because they want nightlife and dates? Are rural towns supposed to create more bars and nightclubs (which of course the market will not support) and have singles mixers? Are municipalities supposed to break up college dorms because they are segregated by family type, ie. nobody is married? And prisons?
- Failed government policies that restrict people's freedom of choice and movement and result in them being, counter to their will, segregated. The state's own policies on funding Affordable Housing development in the largest cities and allocation of housing vouchers to housing authorities in the largest cities has concentrating poverty in cities.
 - Centralize and reform the voucher system and their waitlists first. Only 50% of vouchers are currently utilized, while in MA, over 80% are utilized. Vouchers must bridge the gap to allow renters to find homes in differing housing markets of CT. They must be portable throughout the state and not burdened with additional rules by individual housing authorities. A properly run voucher systems gives the greatest opportunity for housing choice to the renter and is much more cost effective than mandating development of affordable housing, which runs \$250-450K per unit.
 - Many of the largest cities in CT have received hundreds of millions to create affordable housing in their cities, yet few other municipalities have received similar funding. Provide seed funding instead directly to suburbs in their efforts to develop 100% affordable housing in their communities, just as the state has already done for some of the largest cities in CT. This would provide needed funding to suburbs where cost of affordable housing development (\$450K/unit) and land cost is very high, allowing more suburbs to work towards getting an 8-30g moratorium.

2) Create a legislative task force to inventory sewer capacity and a plan to expand sewer capacity in accordance with the state PoCD (but not the local PoCD).

- Sewers are not owned or operated by the state, yet this task force is a state task force. **Intent is to allow higher density multi-family development in areas without town sewer** by increasing septic gallons/day capacity – from 5,000 to some yet undefined state mandated amount, but past bills have pushed for 7,500 - 10,000 capacity increases.
 - We should not be expanding sewer capacity statewide. We should evaluate what systems have excess capacity and could benefit from additional ratepayers. It is likely that a number of systems that already exist do not have the best finances.
 - **Ecological concerns exist for areas with watershed, aquifers, reservoirs and river tributaries to Long Island Sound can be overburdened with dramatically increase septic capacities with high density development in areas lacking Town Sewer and Water. Each town is different, and once size fits all planning strategies do not account for the unique and finite aspects of land.**
 - Conservation directors, health directors & sanitation **experts have not been consulted** on bill.
 - The CT Dept of Health is **not adequately funded and regulations have not been written to ensure proper oversight.**
 - Local municipal experts must have oversight on capacity for smart, sustainable planning given unique conditions of each property.
 - **50% failure rates within 5 years** in RI & MA, and high maintenance costs have put builders in NYS out of business, **creating a public health emergency as the systems fail** and costs then must be absorbed by taxpayers.
- 3) Provide ½ point towards an §8-30g moratorium for duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, cottage clusters, and townhouses that are built as of right within ¼ mile of any transit district (note – not a transit station but any municipality that has set up an independent transit district such as Norwalk Transit District or HART).
- Many Communities all over CT already have significant multifamily development in their downtowns and around transit areas. This has occurred naturally without the need for “As of Right” mandates that take away the ability for local Planning and Zoning to thoughtfully address all higher density development and allow for public hearings where information about the unique aspects and impacts on the individual parcels(s) are able to be disclosed by neighbors.
 - Instead, why not take into account already existing multifamily as part of the 8-30g calculation: **Provide ½ point towards an §8-30g moratorium and in calculating 10% for relief for duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, cottage clusters, and townhouses that within ½ mile of any bus or train stop.** This would incentivize towns to permit greater density near train stations, while also receiving credit for 8-30g moratoriums and the 10% relief calculations. It also recognizes that 90 of 169 communities in CT are “mature” real estate markets with developed downtowns and transit areas because they have over 15% multifamily in their communities, the threshold that is used by MA to exempt municipalities from further Transit Oriented Development.
- 4) Create a common application for housing vouchers and rental payment subsidies to be used by all affordable housing programs in the state, including housing authorities, Study how to improve the processing of such applications and require DOH to seek to expend all funds appropriated for rental assistance.
- It is time to end the bureaucracy created by individual housing authorities with their own unique rules on vouchers that causes 50% of all housing vouchers in CT to go unused!
 - Fix the severely broken voucher system, which can quickly address the financial challenges of many. It is the most equitable way to create greater choice, mobility and faster access to already existing housing throughout the state. Centralize the entire voucher system to prevent different rules imposed by Housing Authorities.
 - Rather than instituting a half way measures to “disclose the rules” attached to the vouchers by the individual housing authorities, or creating a “common application,” the actual distribution of vouchers from the Federal Government by CT should be entirely centralized to prevent the creation

of unique rules by different housing authorities. This consistency in rules allows for greater portability between towns or cities, and allows renters maximum choice where to live.

- Centralizing and standardizing the voucher system provides the greatest access to and protection of naturally occurring affordable housing that already exists statewide.
- Voucher values have not kept up with rent increases. Creating a centralized voucher system will help better address the need for higher cost markets to receive higher value vouchers than other areas of the state. It can open up more opportunity to rent higher cost naturally affordable rentals in Fairfield County by offering higher value vouchers to those looking to live there. This is a more efficient use of state/federal tax dollars and prevents lost opportunities.
- It brings competition and skin in the game to all Housing Authorities to up their customer service and quality of product to attract renters to their Housing Authority rather than confining renters to one Housing Authority by having unique rules that limit portability.
- Centralize Housing Authority Wait Lists as well which will better quantify actual AH demand - prevents duplication of names on different housing lists and overstating the existing need.
- Reduces confusion, improves access & simplifies search for those seeking affordable housing
- We cannot quantify true affordable housing need without first addressing this dysfunctional system that prioritizes protecting the revenue stream of housing authorities rather than focusing on addressing the needs of the residents. No decisions expensive affordable housing mandates should be made without first fully addressing the inefficiencies of the existing housing voucher program that results in so many vouchers being underutilized.
- Do not wait by requiring a study to kick the can down the road and just protect Housing Authority bureaucracy of the largest cities in CT. Residents that are struggling need help now, not 2 years from now. Centralize distribution of vouchers and waitlists this session!

5) Direct state conveyance tax revenues in excess of \$180 million to a state housing Trust Fund.

- Do not remove state conveyance tax revenues from municipalities, let towns put these revenues into their own housing trust funds to create affordable in their own towns. Removing revenues that fund their operations and this will only result in higher local property taxes on residents.

6) Authorize state bonding for the conversion of hotels, malls, and office buildings to multifamily dwellings in non-distressed municipalities.

- This removes areas of commercial development and changes it only into residential.
- Our housing market was stagnant pre pandemic and now there are indications it will be headed towards out-migration again. For far too long, State Public Policy has created an onerous business unfriendly environment which has resulted in CT being the second highest taxed state.
- Address these factors first before subsidizing handouts for housing development that no longer allows commercial enterprise to step into the state? Focus on making CT affordable for businesses and its residents, then the marketplace will take care of expansion of industry, commerce and housing as actual demand increases.

Please do not support these concerning aspects of HB6781.

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